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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 1 April 1997 from the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development

I have the honour to transmit to you the agreed conclusions on women and the environment adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-first session (see annex).

As you will note, the Commission has entrusted me with the responsibility of transmitting the agreed conclusions through you to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, as well as to the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

I would be grateful if arrangements could be made to have these agreed conclusions issued as an official document of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session.

(Signed) Sharon BRENNEN-HAYLOCK
Chairperson
Commission on the Status of Women

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Annex

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION IN THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Agreed conclusions submitted by the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women in the critical area of concern: women and the environment

1. The recently held United Nations conferences and summits, particularly the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, have underlined that the contribution of women to economic development, social development and environmental protection, which are mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development, should be recognized and supported, and that there is need for a clear gender perspective in environmental management. Moreover, unless the contribution of women is recognized and supported, sustainable development will be an elusive goal.

2. In the five-year review and assessment of the results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, moving beyond the concept of women as a major group, a major focus should be the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the development and implementation of all legislation, policies and programmes, with a view to achieving gender equality, taking into account the Beijing Platform for Action and the results of other global conferences.

3. In designing and implementing environmental programmes and policies, including those related to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action at the national and local levels, all responsible actors should ensure that a gender perspective is fully integrated into them, through the development and application of analytical tools and methodologies for gender-based analysis. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be in place to assess gender mainstreaming and its impact.

4. The Commission on Sustainable Development should mainstream a gender perspective into its future work, ensuring that differential impacts on women and men of policies and programmes for sustainable development are well understood and effectively addressed.

5. All responsible actors are requested to adopt a holistic, coordinated and collaborative approach to integrating a gender perspective into sustainable development, between governmental ministries and departments and, at the international level, between United Nations agencies, funds and bodies and other international entities.

6. All responsible actors should support the active participation of women on an equal footing with men in sustainable development at all levels, including participation in financial and technical decision-making through appropriate legislation and/or administrative regulations.

7. Governments should ensure that policies for the liberalization of trade and investment are complemented by effective social and environmental policies into which a gender perspective is fully integrated, so as to ensure that the benefits of growth are fully shared by all sectors of society and to avoid deterioration of the environment.

8. As consumers, both women and men should be more aware of their ability to behave in an environmentally friendly manner through measures such as eco-labelling, which is understood by consumers regardless of age or level of literacy, and local recycling schemes.

9. Gender-sensitive research on the impact of environmental pollutants and other harmful substances, including the impact on the reproductive health of men and women, should be intensified and linked with the incidence of female cancers. The findings should be widely disseminated, taking into account the results of research on the implementation of national policies and programmes. However, lack of full scientific data should not be a reason for postponing measures that can prevent harm to human health.

10. The active involvement of women at the national and international levels is essential for the development and implementation of policies aimed at promoting and protecting the environmental aspects of human health; in particular, in setting standards for drinking water, since everyone has a right to access to drinking water in quantity and quality equal to his or her basic needs. A gender perspective should be included in water resource management which, inter alia, values and reinforces the important role that women play in acquiring, conserving and using water. Women should be included in decision-making related to waste disposal, improving water and sanitation systems and industrial, agricultural and land-use projects that affect water quality and quantity. Women should have access to clean, affordable water for their human and economic needs. A prerequisite is the assurance of universal access to safe drinking water and to sanitation, and to that end, cooperation at both the national and international levels should be encouraged.

11. Governments should combat the illegal export of banned and hazardous chemicals, including agro-chemicals, in accordance with relevant international and regional agreements. Governments should support the negotiation of a legally binding international instrument for the application of prior informed consent procedures for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade.

12. Governments, the international community and international organizations should ensure a participatory approach to environmental protection and conservation at all levels and, in elaborating policies and programmes, should recognize that sustainable development is a shared responsibility of men and women and should take into account both men's and women's productive and reproductive roles.

13. All Governments should implement their commitments made in Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action, including those in the area of financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to

the developing countries, and should ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all such assistance and transfers.

14. The international community and United Nations agencies should continue to assist developing countries in developing the capacity to carry out gender impact assessments and in devising analytical tools and gender-sensitive guidelines. A gender perspective should be mainstreamed into all environmental impact assessments. Governments, the private sector and international financial institutions should accelerate efforts to carry out gender impact assessments of investment decisions.

15. Governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and bodies, and other international organizations should collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex and information related to women and the environment so as to ensure the integration of gender considerations into the development and implementation of sustainable development policies and programmes.

16. Actors such as the United Nations, international financial institutions, Governments and civil society should apply a gender perspective in all funding programmes for sustainable development, while acknowledging the importance of continuing programming targeted at women. Funds should be shared across sectors.

17. Multilateral and bilateral donors, Governments and the private sector should increase support to non-governmental organizations, particularly to women's organizations, in playing an active role in advocacy for the implementation of Agenda 21 at the international and national levels, particularly in supporting national policies and programmes for sustainable development in the developing countries.

18. Such assistance should also be rendered to the countries with economies in transition at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

19. Governments, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, should work in collaboration to provide information on sound environmental practices, support gender-sensitive education and develop specific gender-sensitive training programmes in this area.

20. All relevant actors should be encouraged to work in partnership with adolescent girls and boys, utilizing both formal and non-formal educational training activities, inter alia, through sustainable consumption patterns and responsible use of natural resources.

21. Political parties should be encouraged to incorporate environmental goals with a gender dimension into their party platforms.

22. Governments, in partnership with the private sector and other actors of civil society, should strive to eradicate poverty, especially the feminization of poverty, to change production and consumption patterns and to create sound, well-functioning local economies as the basis for sustainable development, inter alia, by empowering the local population, especially women. It is also important for women to be involved in urban planning, the provision of basic

facilities and communication and transport networks, and in policies concerned with safety. International cooperation should be strengthened to achieve this end.

23. Women have an essential role to play in the development sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management. The knowledge and expertise of women, especially of rural women and indigenous women, in the use and the protection of natural resources should be recognized, consolidated, protected and fully used in the design and implementation of policies and programmes for the management of the environment.

24. Laws should be designed and revised to ensure that women have equal access to and control over land, unmediated by male relatives, in order to end land rights discrimination. Women should be accorded secure use rights and should be fully represented in the decision-making bodies that allocate land and other forms of property, credit, information and new technologies. In the process of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, women should be accorded full and equal rights to own land and other properties, inter alia, through inheritance. Land reform programmes should begin by acknowledging the equality of women's rights to land and take other measures to increase land availability to poor women and men.

25. Governments should promote the development of ecological tourism initiatives in order to promote and facilitate women's entrepreneurial activities in this field.

26. Education and training of young people on the human rights of women should be assured and traditional and customary practices that are harmful to and discriminate against women should be eliminated.

27. Governments, research institutions and the private sector should support the role of women in developing environmentally sound technologies, such as solar energy, and in influencing the development of new and appropriate technologies by ensuring education and training in science and technology.

28. Governments, the private sector and the international community are called upon to give priority attention to the links between security, armed conflict and the environment, and their impact on the civilian population, in particular women and children.

29. Recognizing that gender equality is essential to the achievement of sustainable development, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women should bring the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on women and the environment to the attention of the Chairperson of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and of the General Assembly at its special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21.